

Book Reviews

Iftikhar H. Malik. *State and Civil Society in Pakistan: Politics of Authority, Ideology, and Ethnicity.* Macmillan (in association with St. Anthony's College). 1997. 347pp. Hardbound. £45.00.

Iftikhar H. Malik has taken on a daunting task in trying to write on the state and society of Pakistan. He examines the “triangle of authority, ideology, and ethnicity” and attempts to provide a theoretical and historical framework for the study of Pakistan’s chequered political history. Much in view is the role of the important ruling classes and groups, including the military, the bureaucracy, and the feudals, in the state formation of Pakistan. The author then goes on to discuss the problems of national integration, ethnicity, gender, and the role of the intelligence agencies. The book has obviously required and is based on a great deal of research involving both primary and secondary sources. Wide reference and erudition are fully in evidence.

While discussing ethnicity, he states that the “narrow nature of the state has constantly politicised ethnicity”, and the events of 1971 are related here which led to the breaking away of East Pakistan and the creation of the independent state of Bangladesh. He further castigates the governments in Pakistan for not having learnt anything from the Bangladeshi secession and beginning a military operation in Balochistan. He then proceeds to discuss the ethnic problem in Sindh—how it developed in the 1980s and how it was mishandled. What Dr Malik fails to point out is that, except for Bangladesh, the rest of the ethnic groups which constitute Pakistan have progressively been integrated, over time, in the state of Pakistan. Attaullah Mengal was one of the leaders of the insurgency in Balochistan in the 1970s. His son is now the Chief Minister of Balochistan. The nationalist Awami National Party, or NAP as it was traditionally known, has for the last few years been an ally of the Muslim League, the party which founded Pakistan. Ironically, the ethnic problem in urban Sindh is a direct result of the efforts made at the centre to integrate the province of Sindh in the mainstream politics of Pakistan and give it due representation in the institutions of power. The urban Sindhis, who are basically immigrants, feel that the rural Sindhis have been given representation in different institutions at their expense. That is the only ethnic problem that continues to simmer. What must be kept in mind, however, is that they are partners in the coalition government of Sindh.

Dr Malik’s analysis becomes bleaker still as he proceeds to discuss “ideological polarisation” and the need for a new social contract between the state and society because of the total disregard of constitutionalism and the emphasis on

praetorianism and authoritarianism. As he has not been able to understand the transformation that the society has been undergoing, his study fails to anticipate the power and influence of the democratic forces which have increasingly come to the forefront. In a somewhat simplistic explanation of the “landed élite”, which he says has transformed itself into a “trans-regional group” and damaged itself to the extent that an autonomous, invisible government run by intelligence agencies has unleashed its own forces of blackmail, harassment and torture”, Pakistan begins to sound like a country run by the blackshirts of Mussolini or Franco, not to mention the Nazi SS. Excesses by intelligence agencies in certain episodes of Pakistani history have taken place, as in the crackdown against the “terrorists” in Karachi in the second Benazir government, but not as a matter of course, and they have been condemned. In fact, the misuse of intelligence agencies was one of the allegations used by the President to dismiss her government. The inept and corrupt police force continues to be a source of concern, and requires major reforms, but the connection of the landed élite with the agencies remains difficult to understand.

There is an interesting and a useful chapter on “The Politics of Gender in Pakistan”. It is good to see that authors of new books on Pakistan have come to realise that no discussion of Pakistani society is complete without a discussion of the gender issue. In the struggle for Pakistan, the Quaid-i-Azam declared Muslim women’s participation in the Freedom Movement as equal partners with Muslim men to be a prerequisite for the regeneration and liberation of the Muslim nation. Fatima Jinnah and Raana Liaquat Ali Khan were symbols of the new Pakistani Muslim woman, with their full participation in the struggle for Pakistan side by side with the men of their family, a tradition begun by Bi Amman in the Khilafat Movement of the 1920s; in unprecedented numbers, Muslim women, who until recently had led a cloistered existence, had emerged, often clad in *burqas*, to participate in the agitation and the demonstrations held for the Muslim state.

This ethos continued after independence in 1947. The new Constituent Assembly had a couple of articulate and educated women parliamentarians in it. When General Ayub Khan did away with democracy and began his decade-long rule, he went out of his way to promote the rights and cause of women. His Family Laws Ordinance improved their marriage, inheritance, and divorce rights radically. Bhutto, who successfully launched a movement to topple him, was also of the same view so far as women were concerned. It was only during the eleven-year rule (from 1977) of General Ziaul Haque that, for the first time, an effort was made to pass legislation which reversed their legal rights in personal law. No government since has had the courage to repeal the laws enacted during his regime. However, since Gen. Zia’s departure, the climate for women’s activity is better and their political participation has increased. Successive governments have felt obliged to have at least one woman representative in the cabinet. Domestic violence, involving women, has now become

an issue which gets wide press coverage. Pakistan is the only Muslim country, besides Turkey, which has had a woman Prime Minister. While in the Pakistani cultural set-up a woman is expected to defer to the wishes of her husband and be relatively submissive, there is little or no discrimination against women in the workplace; nor is there any question of different levels of salary between men and women for the same kind of work.

The picture Dr Malik has is somewhat different. He writes that “the policy of prohibiting women’s participation in jobs and sports brought added restraint to a fragile civil society”. In sports, actually, the emphasis is on having segregated sports, in which only women participate and the spectators too would be women only. But there is no attempt made at any point to prohibit women’s sports. To argue that the “brutalisation of women became almost routine” goes beyond even gross exaggeration.

The discussion on the military and the civilian bureaucracy in a separate chapter is balanced and has the depth and understanding of a good historian. He traces the paternalistic characteristics of the Pakistani bureaucracy and military to their formation by the British, who very thoughtfully created them to serve the purposes of their imperial rule in India. He describes how these strong and centralised institutions were not representative of the various regions of Pakistan, as most of their cadres hailed from the Punjab or were from amongst the immigrants who came from India, and how this led to alienation from the government of other ethnic groups, especially the Bengalis. He discusses the role that first the bureaucracy and then the military played in the political life of the country, successfully overruling and subverting the nascent democratic forces.

This well-documented book is a useful addition to the material on Pakistani state and society. Although it is difficult to agree with some of the conclusions that the author reaches on the many issues discussed, yet each theme has been researched rather exhaustively; the information and the data provided are thorough. Dr Malik combines the skills of a historian and a political scientist in his writing. The book has profuse notes following each chapter and the index and bibliography are all-embracing.

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